

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 1400

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SUBJ: THE AFTERMATH OF THE FAYYADIYAH INCIDENTS

1. THE AFTERMATH OF THE FAYYADIYAH AFFAIR PRESENTS PRESIDENT SARKIS WITH WHAT MAY BE THE MOST SERIOUS CRISIS HE HAS FACED SINCE HE ASSUMED OFFICE 18 MONTHS AGO. IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE INCIDENTS, IN WHICH APPROXIMATELY 150 SYRIAN SOLDIERS WERE KILLED, SARKIS AND FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS AGREED WITH THE SYRIANS TO THE CREATION OF TWO COMMISSIONS, AN INVESTIGATIVE COMMITTEE IN WHICH THE LEBANESE HOLD A 3-2 MAJORITY, CHARGED WITH INTERROGATING ALL THOSE WHO WERE INVOLVED IN THE AFFAIR; AND A TRIBUNAL, IN WHICH SYRIAN OFFICERS OF THE ADF HOLD A 3-2 MAJORITY, WHICH IS TO JUDGE THOSE WHO ARE ACCUSED BY THE INVESTIGATIVE COMMITTEE. THIS SOLUTION POSTPONED THE PROBLEM, BUT DID NOT SOLVE IT.

2. SARKIS NOW APPEARS TO BE ON THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA. IF HE ALLOWS A NUMBER OF LEBANESE CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS (AND POSSIBLE CIVILIANS) TO BE CONVICTED, SENTENCED TO
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DEATH AND PERHAPS EVEN EXECUTED, HE WILL ALIENATE AN INFLUENTIAL PART OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. REGARDLESS OF WHAT THE INVESTIGATIVE COMMITTEE MAY SAY PUBLICLY, MANY CHRISTIANS WILL BELIEVE THAT THE ACCUSED LEBANESE ARE SIMPLY SCAPEGOATS WHOSE ONLY CRIME WAS TO DEFEND THEMSELVES AND THAT THEY ARE BEING SACRIFICED TO PLACATE THE SYRIANS. IF ANY DEATH

SENTENCES ARE CARRIED OUT, IT COULD LEAD TO OPEN REBELLION ON THE PART OF SOME CHRISTIAN EXTREMISTS. IF, ON THE OTHER HAND, SARKIS IS ABLE TO MANIPULATE THE INVESTIGATIVE COMMITTEE IN SUCH A WAY THAT NO CHRISTIANS ARE FORMALLY CHARGED, HE RISKS ANTAGONIZING THE SYRIAN MILITARY AND PROBABLY PRESIDENT ASSAD AND HIS ADVISORS AS WELL, WITH UNPREDICTABLE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE FUTURE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO PRESIDENTS AND THE TWO COUNTRIES. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT ASSAD WILL SIMPLY FORGET ABOUT THE 150 DEAD SYRIAN SOLDIERS. IF HE BELIEVES HE IS NOT GETTING "JUSTICE" VIA LEGAL MEANS, HE MAY SEEK IT IN OTHER WAYS.

3. THERE ARE SOME INDICATIONS THAT THE CHRISTIANS ARE HOPING THAT A "LEBANESE" SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM CAN BE WORKED OUT; THAT IS, DRAG OUT THE INVESTIGATION UNTIL TIME AND OTHER EVENTS (SUCH AS THE PALESTINIAN TERRORIST ATTACK IN ISRAEL AND THE ISRAELI RETALIATORY RAID) DISTRACT SYRIAN ATTENTION, WEAKENS THEIR ANGER AT THEIR HUMILIATION AND THEIR DETERMINATION TO SEEK REVENGE. ALTHOUGH THE INVESTIGATIVE COMMITTEE WAS FORMALLY SWORN IN ON FEB 20, IT HAS MET ONLY SPORADICALLY SINCE THEN. THE LEBANESE DAILY LE REVEIL, A FREQUENT SPOKESMAN FOR CONSERVATIVE MARONITE OPINION, CARRIED AN ARTICLE ON MARCH 12 REPORTING THAT THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY MET AGAIN ON MARCH 11 BUT WAS ABLE TO INTERVIEW ONLY TWO OF THE TEN CONFIDENTIAL

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LEBANESE SOLDIERS WHO HAD BEEN CALLED FOR INTERROGATION BECAUSE OF "LACK OF TIME." ACCORDING TO THIS STORY, THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION THEN DECIDED TO POSTPONE THEIR NEXT MEETING UNTIL THURSDAY, MARCH 16. THE ARTICLE CONTINUED THAT SOURCES CLOSE TO THE TRIBUNAL EXPECT THAT ITS WORK WILL CONTINUE FOR "LONG MONTHS" GIVEN THE SLOWNESS OF THE PROCEDURE INVOLVED. IN THE EYES OF MANY LEBANESE, THIS WOULD BE THE IDEAL SOLUTION.

4. AMBASSADOR'S COMMENT. ON MARCH 14 FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS TOLD ME THAT THE JUDICIAL PROCESS WAS MOVING VERY SLOWLY AND SHOOK HIS HEAD. IMPLICATION WAS THAT HE WAS NOT HAPPY WITH THE PACE, AND HE MAY FEEL APPREHENSIVE ABOUT SYRIAN REACTION IF THINGS DRAG ON TOO LONG. FOOTDRAGGING MAY LOOK LIKE THE WAY OUT TO MANY LEBANESE BUT BOUTROS APPARENTLY DOES NOT SHARE THAT VIEW. PRESIDENT SARKIS' REMARKS ON MARCH 9 INDICATE THAT HE TOO HOPES FOR AN EARLY RESOLUTION OF THIS AFFAIR.
PARKER

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